

The Biopolitics of Health

SCTS 615, W 6:00-8:50PM

Professor Ali Kenner, ali.kenner@gmail.com

Office: 3101 Market, Room 222, Office hours: M/W 2:00-3:30PM

Course Description

This course will investigate conceptualizations of life and death, power and subjectivity, individual and population through scholarly work on 'biopolitics'. A core social science framework for examining how contemporary life is defined and governed, biopolitics has shaped opportunities for health, experiences of disease, access to medicine, and capacities for care. In this course, we will read Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics, as well as texts by key commentators. We will also cover contemporary issues where scholars have studied biopolitics on the ground: the opioid epidemic, reproductive science, aging and neuroscience, public health surveillance, and human-animal relations. The course is designed around weekly reading assignments and reflection papers, as well as a case study project.

The course will have five **learning outcomes**. You will:

1. Learn the theoretical origins of "biopower" and "biopolitics" as well as how these frameworks have been discussed and employed in the social sciences.
2. Learn how biopolitics works in different ways, through cross-cultural comparisons and diverse contemporary issues.
3. Learn how health and illness have served as a critical nexus for biopolitics.
4. Cultivate analytic acumen that is specific to the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS).
5. Develop critical analytic skills through written assignments.

Course Texts

All course readings will be provided electronically. Readings must be completed prior to the assigned class session. Be prepared to draw on reading assignments in various class activities – writing activities, small group and class discussion.

Grading

Class Participation	20%
Reading Responses	20% (10 responses, 2 points each)
Group Projects	15% (3 projects, 5 points each)
Biopower Case Study	25%
Theory Studio	20%

Point breakdowns for grades: 98-100 (A+); 93-97 (A); 90-92 (A-); 88-89 (B+); 83-87 (B); 80-82 (B-); 78-79 (C+); 73-77 (C); 70-72 (C-); 68-69 (D+); 63-67 (D); 60-62 (D-) Below 60 (F)

Attendance is required. Unexcused absences will result in a five-point grade reduction per absence.

Attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Subsequent absences will result in a five-point grade reduction per absence. If you show up "on time" and ready to learn for every class this term, three points will be added to your overall course grade.

Course Assignments and Evaluation

Reading Responses (20 responses x 1 point per response = 20 points, 20%)

Reading responses are due before every in-class meeting. Every Wednesday by 10:00AM, post a brief response to the reading (1.5 points) and one to two questions that you have about the reading that you would like to discuss in class (worth .5 point); we will discuss your responses and your questions in class. The response should be at least 150 words, but can be very informal thoughts. Reading responses should be probing and generative; do not summarize the reading. Reflect and ask questions in your responses. Point to how the reading can be useful for something we are trying to learn as a class, as well as how it connects to other topics we're learning about. Think of the reading responses as a quick mechanism to help you get your thoughts down on paper and jumpstart class discussion. Each response is worth two points towards your "Reading Response" grade.

Active Class Participation (20 points, 20%)

Attendance is required, being on time is imperative and active participation is expected. Participation is graded for each class session. Please see the grading rubric for participation. Disruptive class conduct will result in points off your overall course grade. Smartphone use is not allowed during class; points will be deducted from your course grade for non-course related use of digital technology between 6:00-8:50PM. Please arrive and be in your seat ready to start at 6:00PM. We will start promptly at 6:00PM.

Active class participation means listening, being attentive to speakers and engaging peers, guest speakers, and myself; this also means helping to create a space where everyone in the room can participate. Do not dominate class discussion. Laptops should be brought to class and we will use them regularly, but laptops should only be used for course activities. It is very obvious and distracting when students are using their laptops for non-course related activities. If it feels like you or others are being distracted by your laptop, you will lose a point for the day.

This is how I grade your participation each day, which is available in Blackboard.

The Zombie Scale of Classroom Participation

- 1 points = Congratulations! You are a healthy adult human being! And as a responsible adult, you were on time, prepared and are now making quality in-class contributions.
- .75 points = Hmm. You may have prepared, but your contributions are just OK and don't demonstrate any deep understanding of the material. Perhaps you are just having an off day, OR (!) perhaps you have been bitten and now have the zombie plague! It's hard to say . . .
- .50 points = It's fairly clear you've been bitten now. You have the creeping zombie crud. Most times, you sit silently, becoming gray and developing the zombie shake. Sometimes you may talk in class, but what you say is off topic, displays no sense that you read the material, or is pure bullshit. Every now and then you emit strange, small sounds, somewhere between a wheeze and a snore.
- .25 points = No signs of human life remain. Your body may be here, but your mind isn't. If any thought is present, it is for checking your cell phone.
- 0 points = Unexcused Absence. You have become so zombified you are not even here. In all likelihood, you are feasting on someone's liver at Joe's.

Biopower Case Study (25 points, 25%)

This is a 10-15 page essay that analyzes an example of biopolitics. Students will select their own topics, which can be historical or contemporary. The case study is a three-part assignment. Part A, the thesis statement and supporting arguments is due Friday April 27th and is worth five points. Part B, the bibliography and empirical examples are due Friday May 11th and is also worth five points. The final essay submission is due Friday May 25th by midnight and is worth 15 points. See Blackboard for the grading rubrics.

Group Projects (15 points, 15%)

Each week during class approximately one-hour will be spent engaging in small group activities. Work for group project assignments are done only in class, not outside of class. These activities will involve media review, design, presentations, and writing, as well as group discussion. Each group project will be executed over a two-week period; the second week will end the assignment with a 7-8 minute group presentation. See Blackboard for the presentation requirements and grading rubric.

Theory Studio (20 points, 20%)

Theory Studio is a mode of student evaluation that happens in-class as well as through short assignments submitted in weeks nine and ten. Theory Studio will begin during the second half of class on week nine, and will conclude during the final class in week ten. The Studio involves short in-class writing assignments, media analysis, group discussion, and presentations.

Academic Policies

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty of the highest order is expected. It is not acceptable to submit work done for another class in this class, though it is acceptable to build on previous work. Talk to me if you have questions about this. Nor, of course, is it acceptable to submit work done by someone else as your own. Citations must be included for both indirect and direct quotation, providing clear documentation of sources. Special care must be taken to properly cite digital resources. Here is a useful review of plagiarism: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/plagiarism.html>. *If I am able to confirm plagiarism or another form of academic dishonesty on any assignment in this course, you are likely to fail the entire course.* As Drexel students, you are responsible for reading and adhering to Drexel's Code of Conduct: http://www.drexel.edu/studentlife/community_standards/studentHandbook/general_information/code_of_conduct/

Attendance

Attendance is required. Students are allowed one unexcused absence. All other unexcused absences will result in a five-point grade reduction for each unexcused absence. See Drexel's Academic Policy on absences, <http://drexel.edu/provost/policyweb/absence.html>

Grade Appeals

You may appeal a grade through a written statement describing the grounds on which a change of grade should be considered appropriate. Grade appeals must be submitted within one-week of receiving the grade. Before initiating a formal appeal, feel free to talk to me. Please wait a minimum of 24-hours after receiving the grade before contacting me about a grade appeal.

Course Drop Policy

See http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course_drop.asp

Course Change Policy

As the instructor, I have the right to modify this syllabus at any time. I will solicit feedback from the class before any changes are made, and students will be notified in a timely manner both in class and via Drexel email.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Resources should inform me of their needs as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Resources is located at 3201 Arch Street, Suite 210. For more information, see <http://www.drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/>

Quarter Schedule

Week 1 – April 4th

Biopolitical Origins

Michel Foucault (2003) "10 March 1976" (pp. 215-237) and "17 March 1976" (pp. 239-263), from *Society Must Be Defended*.
Thomas Lemke (2011) "The Government of Living Beings," from *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*.

Week 2 – April 11th

Theorizing Biopower

Michel Foucault (2008) "10 January 1979" (pp. 1-26) and "14 March 1979" (pp. 215-239) from *The Birth of Biopolitics*.
Collier and Lakoff (2014) "Vital System Security: Reflexive Biopolitics and the Governance of Emergency," in *Theory, Culture, & Society*, 32(2) pp. 19-51.

Week 3 – April 18th

Immunity, Self,

Body

Michel Foucault's (2008) "5 January 1983 - First and Second Hours," from *The Government of Self and Others* (pp. 42-74).
M. Cameron Hay's (2010) "Suffering in a Productive World: Chronic Illness, Visibility, and the Space Beyond Agency." *American Ethnologist*, 37(2): 259-274.
Joanna Cook's (2016) "Mindful in Westminster: The politics of meditation and the limits of neoliberal critique." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6(1): 141-161.

****First Group Project Due****

Week 4 – April 25th

Populations & Reproductive Justice

Selection from Michelle Murphy (2017) *The Economization of Life*.

Week 5 – May 2nd

Populations & Reproductive Justice

Selection from Joseph Dumit's (2013) *Drugs for Life*.

****Second Group Project Due****

Week 6 – May 9th

Bare Life

Selection from Joao Biehl (2013), *Vita: Zones of Social Abandonment*.

Week 7 – May 16th

Life Bound

Selection from Angela Garcia (2010), *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Depression Along the Rio Grande*.

****Third Group Project Due****

Week 8 – May 23rd	Control & Soft Biopolitics
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McNay, L. (2009). Self as enterprise: Dilemmas of control and resistance in Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(6), 55-77.

Cheney-Lippold, J. (2011). A new algorithmic identity: Soft biopolitics and the modulation of control. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28(6), 164-181.

****Case Study Due By Friday May 25th at 11:59PM****

Week 9 – May 30th	Mattering
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Selection from Anna Kirkland and Jonathan Metzl's *Against Health*. Chapters by Berlant, Masco, Jain, and Siebers.

****Theory Studio Begins****

Week 10 – June 6th	Theory Studio
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Selection from Victoria Pitts-Taylor (ed.)(2016) *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism*.

****Theory Studio Ends****

Week 11 – June 11th	TBD
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